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What do you remember about 1985?

"Back to the Future" was the top-grossing film. "We Are the World" won a Grammy for song of the year.

Robert Ballard found the Titanic in the cold waters 2.5 miles below the surface of the North Atlantic.

The first ".com" domain name was registered. Microsoft introduced Windows.

Closer to home, the *New Times* in its "Best Of" issue declared Old Town Tempe the "best place for a walk."

By 1985 the once sleepy agrarian and university town had emerged as a powerful force in the Valley. A need for developing future leaders became apparent.

It came April 19, 1985, in the form of Tempe Leadership Inc. when a first-term congressman named John McCain, along with Tempe's mayor, Harry Mitchell, kicked off a recruitment campaign for Class I.

The accomplishments of Tempe Leadership and its hundreds of graduates over the last 25 years are well-documented. A quarter century of contributions to the community is the powerful legacy of this important program.

How Tempe Leadership came to be is a fascinating tale of tenacity.

It begins with Tempe resident Hari Khanna, a planner at the Arizona Department of Transportation who graduated from Valley Leadership Class IV in 1983.

Khanna believed Tempe needed its own leadership program. So carrying on the Valley Leadership tradition of requiring each class to complete a special project, Khanna made initiating a Tempe leadership program his "special project."

Although Khanna wasn't even a Tempe Chamber of Commerce member, he recognized the chamber was the best organization to sponsor a leadership program so he approached Executive Director Dennis Ricardo with his plan in 1983.

Ricardo was intrigued by the idea, but didn't offer much encouragement because the chamber couldn't afford to take on an additional expense.

Unwilling to take no for an answer, Khanna began pressing Paul Wolfe, publisher of the *Tempe Daily News*.

Wolfe supported Khanna's vision and used his paper as a bully pulpit to promote the idea.

Khanna, meanwhile, continued pressuring the chamber. He even joined its ranks in 1984 to strengthen his lobbying efforts.

After nearly a year of cajoling Ricardo, Khanna met then-chamber President Don Cassano who recalls first talking to Khanna about Tempe Leadership "over a glass of iced tea on a summer day."

Keeping up the pressure, Khanna told Cassano "(you) could become famous as the man who started Tempe Leadership." Cassano (who served on the City Council 1984-94) persuaded the chamber's board to approve a Tempe Leadership program.

With help from Cassano, Chamber President-elect Bill Alexander and fellow Valley Leadership

classmate Ivan Johnson, Khanna finally prevailed, establishing a long-standing tradition of developing leaders in Tempe that continues a quarter-century later.